

Guest
ColumnBy **Srinath Fernando**

UNP Deputy Leader and the power struggle

THERE have been press reports lately giving a very messy picture of the state of affairs at the Ministry of External Affairs. The Deputy Leader of the UNP is calling for the resignation of Prof. G.L. Peiris in view of the ever-growing political chicanery at the Ministry.

The UNP Deputy Leader is mistaken in his assessment of Prof. Peiris. It would be better if the UNP Deputy Leader thinks critically about his actions that have had a very detrimental impact on the UNP and morale of the UNPers. If he wants to wrestle the leadership, he must first garner support from the old guard. Without wider support it would be a mistake even to attempt a leadership contest.

The UNP consists of various interests and interest groups. There are powerful pole-vaulters and what would be situation if he becomes the leader, only to create another powerful faction that would undermine his position? Just the same way of conducting separate May Day rallies in contravention of party decisions. He would realise the importance of party discipline when he becomes the leader of UNP in the future.

As far as his personal goals are concerned, his actions only undermine his long-term objectives as by that time UNP will have been weakened even further. It is high time he set aside his factional politics and stood behind the UNP Leader.

Prof. GLP: a man with many credentials

It is not the Minister but the policies of the Government that have bedevilled the External Affairs Ministry. He is an academic of international repute and one of the scholars of rare type with unparalleled credentials. It would be a mistake to replace Prof. Peiris at this hour of need. He has excellent contacts with various governments and he is the ideal mouthpiece to retrieve our lost friendship with the West.

Some of our academics who had been appointed as ambassadors and who had been defending Sri Lanka on human rights issues seem to be writing strange stories to newspa-

Special Presidential Commission of Inquiry needed to overhaul Foreign Ministry



External Affairs Minister Prof. G.L. Peiris

pers about the dynamics of decision-making at highest levels of Government.

Prof. Peiris' approach is markedly different from these academics who have been a little aggressive in their choice of words when diplomacy was the need of the hour whereas Prof. Peiris is more into using proper niceties of diplomacy and not interested in verbosity.

However, the internal dynamics that have come to light through media seem to indicate that a drastic overhaul is needed. This is a prelude to a wider discussion that is necessary in order to revamp the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Some press reports indicated that the previous Minister had the gumption to appoint some of his close confidants to key positions and there have been widespread revulsion among career diplomats over such appointments.

We had a similar situation when the July '83 riots broke out in Sri Lanka and the international media had field days reporting on

the worst atrocities against Tamil civilians in Sri Lanka. Most of the Heads of Diplomatic Missions were from the Tamil community and none had the courage to defend the Sri Lankan Government at that time, it was purely because families, properties and friends of ambassadors themselves had come under fire from the marauders who had taken the law unto themselves.

Strategic influence might be needed

The mechanism of overhauling the Foreign Ministry must be through a Special Presidential Commission of Inquiry so a that wider cross section of experts could be appointed to look into our foreign policy options and the internal set-up that is needed to accomplish the policy objectives.

The need for reforms is pressing in view of the rapidly changing situation in Tamil Nadu. One aspect Sri Lanka might have to look into is the strategic influence. There seems

to be a hate campaign against Sri Lanka especially in Tamil Nadu targeting individuals, organisations and properties of Sri Lanka.

It is high time Sri Lanka entered the war of ideas, of hearts and minds – a war of ideologies as potent and dangerous as it is manifested in the overseas media. The war for the minds of men should include our friends, allies and neutral audiences as well as hostile ones.

Strategic influence is primarily defined as the deliberate, conscious coordination or integration of all Government informational activities designed to influence opinions, attitudes and behaviour of foreign groups in such a way that it would promote the agendas of Sri Lanka and to achieve maximum psychological effect.

Moderation in dealing with hostile powers

We must not lose sight of the fact that ours is a small country and no world power is going cow down to dictates of Sri Lanka. We need to live with all issues of the global power game, especially between India and Unites States.

There are regular consultations between India and Unites States over the internal affairs of Sri Lanka. There is a strategic partnership between India and United States. This newly-formed partnership is keeping close tabs over ever-growing Chinese influence in Sri Lanka. It is the Government that must balance the scales of power politics in the region.

India would not allow China to exploit our oil and mineral resources. China may have such grand intentions but at the end of the day we will have to go with India. We must never overlook or underestimate India's will to dilute the Chinese influence in Sri Lanka.

Never should we expect a Congress government to be in power all the time and there is potential for a coalition partnership in Delhi with Tamil parties with written agreements and accords to intervene in Sri Lankan domestic affairs.

CONSPIRACY DESK
By Dinesh Watawana

COLUMNISTS come and go. Hope this one stays!

I'll agree to do that; if you'd let me kick up controversy, poke fun at you and distort the life out of news and gossip that come my way. The Daily FT Ed is a nice guy; he's already let me do that. As long as I stick to a weekly spiel; he doesn't have enough hair to lose daily. I'll try to compensate for it with the one day I've got!

Just read that a new law prohibits the infamous tuk-tuk from carrying more than 14 passengers... err...3, to be precise. The Government believes that it would dissuade couples from having more than one child. Or the extra one will have to take the bus. Latest State-commissioned research shows that Minister Bandula G erred when he said a family of four could live on a budget of Rs. 7,500. It now turns out that the correct number is 3. Hence, the new tuk-tuk rule with the future in mind.

Got invited to Borderlands Adventure Camp in Kitulgala. Here are the true heroes of Sri Lankan tourism. How they turn nature's frills and shrills into an awesome show of bone-jarring adventure is what the wonder of Asia is all about. Sliding 20 feet on a watery rock surface and plunging into a natural pool makes your hair sit up and demands your innermost fears to take a hike. You should try it!

How a handful of enterprising minds have turned Kitulgala in to Sri Lanka's 'Adventure Mile' deserves

kudos. No State orchestrating here, just a whole community turning pro. While white water rafting, you arrive at the point where the immortal classic 'Bridge on the River Kwai' was filmed. What is left of what should have been a historic landmark is just a bit of concrete pillar, barely visible. Not even a sign to celebrate yet another accolade for Sri Lanka. Mr. Doom predicted today that inflation would reach catastrophic proportions before the world ends on 21 December. The Rupee is taking a beating, but the Big Mac Index hasn't seen any seismic activity with the popular Big Mac still selling at the old price in Colombo.

The Big Mac Index is published by The Economist as an informal way of measuring the Purchasing Power Parity (PPP) between currencies and provides a test of the extent to which market exchange rates result in difference prices for a relatively identical good (in this case, the Big Mac burger) in different countries. The Big Mac of McDonald's fame is used as a universal benchmark. Hoping that Mrs. Pestonjee doesn't read this.

TGIF! TG for the Poya Days and all other holidays. TG for us being born in the land of holidays.

(The columnist is a former foreign correspondent and military analyst. He is a brand consultant and heads The 7th Frontier, an integrated communications agency which masterminded the globally-acclaimed eco tourism hotspot KumbukRiver. He can be reached via email dinna7th@siltnet.lk.)

THE ASEAN summit recently concluded in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and I was invited to speak at a leadership forum and a youth roundtable dialogue that were held in conjunction with the ASEAN summit.

I had the honour of sharing the platform with many distinguished personalities from the region, many of them considered ASEAN experts. By no means do I consider myself an expert, but being a Malaysian, having studied in Singapore and having grown my business in the ASEAN region, I believe I am in a position to speak on behalf of the lay people, the tradesmen and the business people, who have made ASEAN what it is today.

There was an ASEAN long before the actual ASEAN came into being. Historically we have always been connected. The Khmer empire, founded by King Jayavarman was one of the most powerful empires in Southeast Asia for more than 600 years and spanned the modern day Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Burma, and Malaysia.

Trade has been plying between the Indo-China region and the Western world for centuries. People braved turbulent seas, winds, weather, tide and the occasional pirate just to get to this part of the world. What drove them was trade and business. Cloves, cinnamon and spices were worth their weight in gold. This is where the spice trade began and kingdoms flourished.

Then came the colonial period and for the next 100 years we were looking West. In Indonesia it was the Dutch, in Malaysia it was British, in Cambodia it was the French, in Sri Lanka it was the Portuguese, Dutch and British one after the other. The boundaries as we know them today were drawn only within the last 100 years by Western colonisers.

The ASEAN I see today is very different from the one I grew up in. I remember Singapore as a young boy. That Singapore does

Look East

not exist today. Lee Kuan Yew took over a sleepy fishing village and created an economic miracle and no one saw that coming. My own country Malaysia has grown over the last few decades in a way that I could not

Guest
ColumnBy **Vijay Eswaran**

have foreseen as a young boy.

Malaysian Prime Minister Datuk Seri Najib Tun Razak, in his address at the ASEAN Leadership Forum, aptly argued that knowledge is the connecting thread between us and deserves the greatest impetus. I couldn't agree more. Education has to be our priority and not just ASEAN member

states but other Asian nations too must initiate concrete steps to enhance educational opportunities.

Historically, Asia was once the hub of education, long before the Oxfords and Harvards were established. Angkor Wat and Borobudur temples were not built without architects and the people who built them were not educated in the West.

Palembang in the ancient Kingdom of Srivijaya (in modern day Indonesia) was once the centre of Sanskrit and Buddhist learning. Nalanda, one of the first universities in recorded history, in the ancient Gupta Empire, was once a prominent institution for higher learning that attracted pupils and scholars from Sri Lanka, Korea, Japan, China, Tibet, Indonesia, Persia and Turkey, and influenced much of the region. In fact it even had two Sri Lankan abbots, Aryavada and Asanga. The Alahana Pirivena in Sri Lanka



The ASEAN summit recently concluded in Phnom Penh, Cambodia

was a university for Buddhism built by King Parakramabahu in the 12th century.

There is no reason why we cannot rebuild that standard of education again. Asia is already home to several excellent universities. National University of Singapore often ranks within Top 50 in the world. There's IIT in India, considered the premier institution for engineering and computer science and IIT graduates are much in demand in the Western world.

The law school in Ateneo de Manila University is so highly revered that students from all over Asia come to the Philippines to study in it. Asia is also the centre of Ayurveda, the ancient medical science that has been in existence long before Hippocrates was even born.

It was not too long ago that students from South East Asia came to Sri Lanka to study. Prior to 1983 it was not uncommon for Malaysians and Singaporeans in particular to come to Sri Lanka for the first part of their education prior to going to UK

and in some cases even complete their education in Colombo in the field of accountancy, law and medicine. I personally have friends from Singapore and Malaysia who studied in Colombo in the '70s.

And yet, we continue to look West. If you visit a campus in UK, or US it is not uncommon to find a large mix of Asian students. Ironically, the diversity of Asians on a Western campus today is far more than any you will find in any Asian University campus.

Education in South East Asia today needs to be adequate in order for it to compare with the US or UK. It needs recognition from the government. We can begin by identifying our existing educational resources and cooperate bilaterally and regionally to develop it further. Seminars and forums such as the recent one in Cambodia certainly help. However, the private sector also needs to play a part in raising the standards of education.

Being an ASEAN benefi-

ary myself, my contribution to this initiative is the Quest International University Perak (QIUP), which the QI Group has set up in cooperation with the Perak State Government in Malaysia.

I draw upon my own campus based learning experiences while a student in the University of Illinois in the '80s. That's what I envision in QIUP, where students don't just learn by rote but are encouraged to think, to innovate, to question and enjoy the experience of learning while being a part of a campus community.

One of my cherished dreams for QIUP is the development of a medical program that won't just focus on Western medicine but also allow students to learn from traditional and alternative medicine such as Ayurveda, Siddha and Traditional Chinese Medicine, thus allowing for an East-West confluence.

I acknowledge and understand the disparity of economies within Asian coun-

tries. Asia is such a diverse region but there is so much to be learnt here. A one year exchange program for students between developing and developed countries would go a long way in creating a better understanding of our differences and closing the cultural and economic gap. However this gap between developed and developing countries should not be a barrier.

Asia's economy is growing so rapidly, that you see third generation Asians from America and Europe, coming back to Asia to work and study. China and India are the second and fourth largest economies in the world. According to a Goldman Sachs report, the BRIC economies could overtake the G6 by 2040. Clearly Sri Lanka has taken a leap forward and in the last 18 months in all sectors of the economy, one that has been noticed by investors such as myself and those from other nations. The upward mobility of the Sri Lankan economy in recent times is reminiscent of the ASEAN economies in the mid 90s, when they were labelled the Asian Tigers.

We need to stop looking West for direction and solutions. Our problems are unique unto ourselves and therefore the solutions will also be. We are Asian and we need to be proud of it. Our solutions lie within us. We have already proven that we can be the best in the world in any field of endeavour.

Pick any field of science, technology, philosophy, medicine or even poetry, music or sports, you will find Asians excelling in every single one of them. Be they from this part of the world or those who were raised in the West. The point though is that it can be done and we can do it. We simply have to stop looking West.

(The writer is a leading Asian businessman, bestselling author and speaker. He is also a major investor in the Colombo Stock Exchange.)

FT Quote



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